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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [KPAL](#) [IS](#) [EG](#)
SUBJECT: EGYPT PREPARES FOR GAZAN HAJJ PILGRIMS

Classified By: MINISTER COUNSELOR WILLIAM R. STEWART
REASONS: 1.4 (B) and (D)

¶1. (C) MFA Deputy Director for Palestinian Affairs Barakat Leithy told us November 26 that the Egyptians are preparing for approximately 3200 Hajj pilgrims to transit Egypt from Gaza en route Saudi Arabia. This is an increase of approximately 1000 from last year. Leithy said that GOE policy is that all pilgrims must have valid Saudi Arabian visas to transit Egypt. He reported that both Hamas and the Palestinian Authority have sponsored the visa applications for a portion of the 3200 pilgrims.

¶2. (C) Leithy acknowledged the PA preference that the GOE only to allow those pilgrims sponsored by the PA to enter Egypt. The GOE has not made a policy determination as to whether they will accept only PA-sponsored pilgrims. As a practical matter, Leithy said that Hamas will likely block any pilgrims from using Rafah crossing to enter Egypt unless Hamas-sponsored pilgrims are part of the contingent. He worried that this would put Egypt in a potentially difficult political position. Leithy also noted his understanding that Hamas will likely block Hajj pilgrims attempting to reach Saudi Arabia via Israel (e.g. via Erez crossing).

¶3. (C) MOD contacts told us that the GoE plans to bus the Hajj pilgrims under "tight escort" to the coastal city of Nuweiba, from where they will be ferried to Saudi Arabia. They assess that the GOE is better prepared operationally for this year's pilgrimage, noting that Egyptian-Israeli MOD communication is improved as compared to last year, due to a variety of factors including the "tahdiya" (calming) between Hamas and Israel.
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